

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

Claims 1-13 (Cancelled).

14. (Currently Amended) A process for producing a glass core preform for a low-attenuation optical fiber, the process comprising:

producing a soot core preform by chemical deposition on a substrate;

removing the substrate from the soot core preform, thereby forming a central hole along the soot preform;

drying and consolidating the soot core preform in a furnace to form a said glass core preform; and

stretching the glass core preform;

wherein the step of drying and consolidating comprises reducing the diameter of the central hole without extracting the glass core preform from the furnace,

wherein and the step of stretching comprises closing the central hole,

wherein the diameter of the central hole at the end of the drying and consolidating step is about 0.05 mm to about 0.40 mm.

15. (Previously Presented) The process according to claim 14, wherein the step of reducing the diameter of the central hole comprises reducing the pressure inside the central hole and subjecting the glass core preform to a temperature sufficient to soften glass.

16. (Cancelled)

17. (Previously Presented) The process according to claim 14, wherein the diameter of the central hole at the end of the drying and consolidating step is about 0.05 mm to about 0.2 mm.

18. (Previously Presented) The process according to claim 14, wherein the diameter of the central hole at the end of the drying and consolidating step is at most 1:10 of an initial diameter of the central hole.

19. (Currently Amended) The process according to claim 14, wherein the step of drying and consolidating ~~is performed in a furnace and~~ includes drying the soot core preform at a first temperature, consolidating the de-hydrated soot core preform at a second temperature higher than the first temperature and subjecting the consolidated core preform to a third temperature higher than the second temperature for reducing said diameter.

20. (Currently Amended) The process according to claim 14, wherein the step of drying and consolidating ~~is performed in a furnace comprising a first zone and a second zone, and~~ comprises the following sequence of steps:

drying the soot core preform in ~~the~~ a first zone of said furnace;

moving the dried soot core preform from the first zone of said furnace to ~~the~~ a second zone of said furnace;

consolidating the soot core preform in the second zone to form a consolidated core preform;

moving the consolidated core preform from the second zone to the first zone;

reducing the pressure in the central hole;

increasing the temperature in the second zone to a temperature sufficient to soften glass;

moving the consolidated core preform from the first zone to the second zone;

keeping the consolidated core preform in the second zone until the diameter of the central hole has reduced to a desired value; and

removing the consolidated core preform from the furnace.

21. (Previously Presented) The process according to claim 15, wherein said pressure is reduced to at most 200 mBar.

22. (Previously Presented) The process according to claim 21, wherein said pressure is reduced to at most 100 mBar.

23. (Previously Presented) The process according to claim 20, wherein said pressure is reduced to at most 200 mBar.

24. (Currently Amended) The process according to claim ~~22~~23, wherein said pressure is reduced to at most 100 mBar.

25. (Previously Presented) The process according to claim 14, wherein reducing the diameter of the central hole comprises subjecting the glass core preform to a temperature of about 1495 °C to about 1540 °C.

26. (Previously Presented) The process according to claim 14, wherein reducing the diameter of the central hole comprises subjecting the glass core preform to a temperature sufficient to soften glass for 1 hour to 3 hours.

27. (Previously Presented) The process according to claim 14, wherein the soot core preform has a core radius and an external radius, the ratio between the core radius and the external radius being lower than 0.4.

28. (Currently Amended) The process according to claim 20, further comprising fitting a low-melting temperature member to a lower end of the central hole glass before the step of drying, and wherein reducing the pressure in the central hole comprises extracting gas from the central hole from an upper end thereof.